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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether low-wage work would affect low-income, Head Start-enrolled mothers' psychological well-being and parenting style over time. Respondents were low-income, rural and urban mothers participating in a study on parenting and child development. In 1996-97 and 1998-99, mothers completed interviews on demographics, depressive symptoms, expression of negative emotions, and parenting style. Researchers collected data on mothers' employment entry, exits, and length of participation; stressfulness of the most recent job; stressful life events; and use of coercive versus firm parenting. Most respondents worked outside the home in various service, clerical, manufacturing, and entry-level health care jobs. One half were working when their children enrolled, and two-thirds were working 2 years later. The study did not find that work involvement impacted mothers' depressive symptoms and use of angry and coercive parenting. Mothers who worked longer hours, more months of the year did not have lower financial strain than mothers who worked less. Lower prestige, more stressful jobs had a significant negative impact on mothers' mental health and provision of optimal parenting over time. One-third of mothers reported clinical levels of depressive symptoms upon enrollment. Depressive symptoms decreased over time. (Contains 57 references.) (SM)

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Does work have an impact on depressive symptoms and parenting among low-income mothers of Head Start preschoolers?

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Since the passage of Federal Welfare Reform legislation in 1996, low-income women have faced increasing policy pressure to work outside the home. A large, "first wave" of research on the effects of Welfare Reform focused primarily on whether programs were successful in reducing welfare caseloads and in moving low-income women from reliance on public assistance into work (Brooks-Gunn, Smith, Berlin & Lee, 1998). In response to calls by a number of senior investigators (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Duncan & Chase-Lansdale, 2001), a growing "second wave" of research has addressed questions of the impact of these employment programs on families' psychosocial wellbeing and children's social, behavioral and academic outcomes. Research has also shifted to consider the ways in which some families may face more barriers than others, in moving from public aid recipiency into work (Lennon, et al, 2001; Yoshikawa, et al, 1999). For example, recent findings regarding the positive effects of the New Hope Welfare Reform demonstration project suggests that benefits accrued to children through families' use of program-supported, out-of-home after-school care, but that families' participation in a host of additional work, parenting, and social service supports did not significantly affect their perceptions of financial strain, their levels of depressive symptoms, or their use of effective versus ineffective parenting styles (Huston, et al, 2001).

Interestingly, these findings open debate to broader questions regarding whether low-wage work can reasonably be expected to have a positive or negative effect on parenting among poor families. Increasingly, a number of investigators have argued for the utility of asking these questions in "naturalistic" contexts outside of welfare-reform-related employment and self-sufficiency supports (Brooks-Gunn et al, 1998; Jackson, et al, 2001). Specifically, do low-income families benefit, both materially and psychologically, from mothers' increased employment, in the absence of specific welfare-reform-oriented policy intervention?

While the bulk of earlier research has been conducted on the impact of maternal employment on child outcomes among middle-income and affluent families (Desai, Chase-Lansdale, & Michael, 1989; Harvey, 2000), less is known regarding the impact of maternal employment on the psychological and emotional well-being of poor families. In addition, many low-income families are served through a second avenue of intervention: namely early educational programs that may facilitate parental employment as well as providing young children with preschool experience (Brooks-Gunn, Berlin & Fuligni, 1999; Tout, Zaslow, Papillo, & Vandivere, 2001). Yet most developmental research on early educational interventions such as Head Start have not generally reported on mothers' employment, nor whether any program effects may be mediated or moderated by increases in maternal employment. To address this gap, this paper briefly reviews extant research on the impact of maternal employment on family functioning among low-income families with young children. This study then goes on to test a series of hypotheses regarding whether low-wage work either has positive or negative effects on low-income, Head Start-enrolled mothers' psychological well-being and parenting style, over a two-year period.

Hypothesized effects of maternal employment: good, bad, or indifferent?

Working in a financially- and psychologically-rewarding job may have clear benefits for low-income mothers and their families. Prior research using large nationally representative data sets suggest that increases in employment and exits from welfare are associated with improvements in poor families' income, home environments and with long-term benefits for children (Garrett, Ng'andu & Ferron, 1994; Meyer & Cancian, 1998; Zill, Moore, Sith, Stief, & Coiro, 1995). Young mothers participating in self-

sufficiency activities such as work, education, or training have been found to be less emotionally negative and less controlling than mothers who did not participate in such activities (Aber, Brooks-Gunn & Maynard, 1995; Zazlow, et al., 1998). At first glance, this would suggest that higher levels of low-income mothers' participation in the workforce should be associated with improvements in parenting.

To explain these potential improvements, a number of different mechanisms of work's influence on family functioning are often suggested. First, employment may have salutary effects on mothers' emotional and psychological wellbeing, providing families with a sense of daily routine and women with a positive set of socially organizing and supportive experiences outside the home (Wilson, 1987). Second, mothers' employment might be expected to indirectly affect family wellbeing by alleviating financial strain, which might, in turn have alleviate the psychological stress of trying to provide for one's family with limited resources, and may improve adults' ability to interact in warm, supportive, and emotionally positive ways with their children (Conger, et al., 1992; Desai et al, 1989; McLoyd, 1990).

On the other side of the debate, some recent research suggests that the effects of low-income work force entry on family functioning may be negative rather than positive. The psychological benefits of work may be outweighed by its psychological costs: Some low-income women may face overwhelming and inflexible work demands at low-wage, unstable jobs; as low-income women face greater work stresses, their ability to parent successfully may be increasingly compromised (Repetti & Wood, 1997; Wilson, et al., 1995). Importantly, employment in jobs that are low in complexity appears to have negative effects on child outcomes among educationally disadvantaged, lower-income families (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Work participation may involve a substantive increase in daily hassles, major stressors, and dysphoria as mother struggle to find adequate child care, deal with the demands of low-wage work, and have less time to complete routine household and caregiving tasks (Wilson, et al., 1995; Zaslow, et al., 1998). This may not bode well for parenting, given that prior research suggests that mothers facing increased life stress and higher levels of depression show less responsiveness and lower consistency in setting limits (Downey & Coyne, 1991; Wilson, et al., 1995).

In addition, work's hypothesized benefits via mothers' increased earnings will depend, in large part, on women's wage rates. Given that the Federal minimum wage, alone, does not raise families above the U.S. poverty line, most low-income women may be unable to earn sufficient income to "make work pay," in economic as well as psychological terms (Jackson, et al, 2000; Ellwood, 1988). Work may have additional, negative effects on family life, in that women may spend less time with their children, essentially investing their time in wage-earning effort at the expense of time caring for their children (Belsky &Eggebeen, 1991; Kalil & Eccles, 1998). Children of working mothers, in turn, spend more hours in child care settings. The effects of employment on children may often be confounded by questions of quantity of children's exposure to high quality versus inadequate and unstimulating child care environments (Desai, et al, 1989).

A third possibility is that work has no demonstrable effects on mothers' mental health and parenting. In short, the case could be made that, while work may not improve families' fortunes, at least work does not make families worse off. Recent re-analyses of a large, nationally representative data set (the NLSY) considered the effects of timing, extensiveness, and intensity of mothers' work involvement on children, and found few significant effects (Harvey, 2000). Similarly, results from studies of mothers leaving Welfare for work suggest that, while the benefits of mothers' participation in a host of employment-related services are open to question, it appears that participation is

not, at least, causing serious harm (Duncan & Chase-Lansdale, 2001; Kalil, Dunifon & Danziger, 2001; Morris et al, 2001).

How is it that some studies can conclude that work has a positive effect, other studies conclude that work has negative effects, and a third set of studies find no effect? Differences in findings may be due to a number of types of bias (for review, see Morris & Genetian, 1999). Specifically, simultaneity bias may be introduced when supposedly exogenous variables such as maternal employment and endogenous variables such as mothers' mental health may in fact be bi-directionally related. Additionally, omitted variables bias may be introduced when both sets of variables may be significantly influenced by a third set of unmeasured, or "omitted" characteristics, such as mothers' educational level, income, interpersonal styles or psychological health (Kalil, Dunifon, & Danziger, 2001; Mayer, 1997; Yoshikawa et al, 2000; Zazlow, et al, 1990). Positive associations between work and more positive parenting styles among young mothers in the Teenage Demonstration Project, for example, may have been due to pre-existing motivational characteristics that led some mothers to take greater advantage of work opportunities as well as to provide more warm, less controlling parenting to their preschoolers (Brooks-Gunn, et al, 1998). Notably, a number of investigators no longer view unmeasured characteristics as methodological snare and, instead, now argue that exogenous characteristics such as low maternal education, single-parent status, and mental health problems can be viewed as barriers to maternal employment and to mothers' use of other available social services (Yoshikawa, 1999; Danziger et al, 2000).

This paper aims to respond to these concerns by following recent recommendations to carry out "fixed effects" models of the impact of maternal employment on family and child outcomes by controlling for earlier levels of those outcomes (Menaghan, et al, 1998; Duncan, et al, 1998). Specifically, "fixed effect" models that test for the impact of maternal employment on parenting and depressive symptoms are expected to generate conservative estimates, because they will include earlier assessments of mental health and parenting as additional exogenous variables, and treat employment as an endogenous variable. In the analyses that follow, employment will be modeled as a mediator, potentially affected by mothers' prior level of depressive symptoms and emotional expressiveness as well as serving as a predictor of *changes* in mothers' mental health and parenting, over time.

In sum, this study examines whether work has any direct influence on parenting style or whether it any indirect influence, through a) mothers' perceived financial strain and b) mothers' depressive symptoms. By examining this question among a population of Head Start-using families, for whom uniformly adequate quality child care is provided, this paper aims to circumvent debates regarding whether the effects of maternal employment on family functioning are due to variability in child care usage or quality.

Expanding definitions of employment and parenting

Early research on the impact of maternal employment on child outcomes considered work in categorical terms, comparing outcomes for unemployed versus employed mothers (Harvey, 2000). Later definitions of work were expanded to consider timing of work (such as within the first year of the child's birth, e.g. Belsky, 1988), duration of work (for example, number of years of early childhood that a mother works, see Harvey, 2000 for review), and intensity of work involvement (e.g. considering both amount worked in a given year and amount worked per week, e.g. Danziger, et al, 2001). Shifting the focus from quantity to quality of work, Menaghan, Parcel, and colleagues have focused extensively on the type of jobs held by employed mothers. Specifically, mothers' job entry into low-wage, menial jobs has been found to exert a negative effect on the family's home environment, as measured using Caldwell's HOME

assessment (Menaghan & Parcel, 1995). Importantly, there was less of a drop in caregiving quality for women entering better-paying, higher quality jobs.

Quality of work can be conceptualized in a number of ways. First, many low-income women may be relegated to occupations that require low skill, low levels of autonomy, and high levels of repetition, having a negative rather than positive impact on mental health (Gecas, 1989; Zill, Moore, Nord & Stief, 1991). Alternately, participation in a rewarding and relatively supportive workplace may have clear, salutary effects on low-income mothers' mental health (Klebanov, et al., 1997). Fortunately, the rating of occupational prestige, used by the General Social Survey (GSS) can be used to classify occupations that provide more or less autonomy, demand greater versus less repetition, and are more or less menial (Mortimer & Lorence, 1979). Second, quality of work can be assessed by determining whether mothers, themselves, view their jobs as more or less stressful.

Thus, this study follows up on questions of the quality of the type of job held by mothers, to determine whether a "good" job is better than a "bad" job in psychological and family functioning terms. Recent welfare Reform initiatives have tested competing approaches to maternal employment, by encouraging a "work first" versus a "human capital investment" approach to moving recipients of public assistance off of rolls and towards economic self-sufficiency. Specifically, demonstration programs that have emphasized immediate job placement have found that a significant proportion of mothers quickly lose their jobs, "cycling" back onto reliance on public assistance. In contrast, programs that encourage mothers' education and training are expected to pay off in mothers' higher-paying and higher quality jobs, in the long run, while foregoing immediate labor-force attachment and earnings in the short run. While this study does not focus on families using or leaving TANF rolls, and is nonexperimental in design, it can provide useful information regarding the impact of low-quality versus high-quality jobs for a sample of "working poor" women who struggle to find and keep jobs without the additional child care, transportation, case management and supports and income subsidies that these demonstration programs typically have provided (see also, Jackson et al, 2000).

In addition, this study takes a more comprehensive look at the style of parenting used by working and nonworking mothers in low income families. Following developmental research that suggests that parents resort to more power-assertive and coercive strategies of discipline when under greater financial strain (Dodge, et al., 1994; Elder, Eccles, Ardelt & lord, 1995; McLoyd & Wilson, 1994), this study focuses on mothers' use of firm limit-setting versus coercive practices as an important index of optimal parenting. Recently, a number of investigators have argued that firm limit-setting and high monitoring represent a normative form of "no nonsense" parenting that is associated with optimal child outcomes, particularly for African American children (Brody & Flor, 1998, p. 805; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1999).

Recent theoretical models of parents' parenting styles suggest that parents resort to these more harsh and coercive parenting styles as a result of their own rising feelings of anger, irritation, and distress, particularly as economic and psychological pressures mount (Brody, et al. 1994; Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons & Whitbeck, 1992; Raver, in preparation). Parents' emotional styles appear to influence not only on their use of firm versus coercive parenting styles, but also children's development of later emotional and social competence, among both middle- and low-income samples (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992; Denham & Grout, 1993; Garner, Jones & Miner, 1994; Isley et al., 1999; Raver & Spagnola, in press). Given the importance of parents' styles of emotional expressiveness for their parenting, this study includes

measures of mothers' expressiveness of feelings of anger, frustration, and irritation, both in the context of caring for their children, and in creating a general family emotional climate. In so doing, this study aims to fill an empirical gap between literature in developmental psychology that often leaves questions of maternal employment unaddressed, and the literature in maternal employment, that must often rely on relatively few survey items (e.g. from Caldwell and Bradley's (1984) HOME Scale), tapping maternal warmth and use of corporal punishment as indices of parenting style.

To control for the potential confound that child's age may have on mothers' labor force participation, mental health and parenting, this study's sample is restricted to include low-income mothers of children ages 3.5 to 5. In addition, previous research suggests that women's ability to enter and remain in the labor force and their consequent ability to handle the stresses of work and family may be affected by the cost and availability of child care. To control for this second confound, this study is carried out among women who have enrolled their children in Head Start programs, which provides fully subsidized, high-quality child-care as well as transportation for participating children to eligible families. Previous research indicates that Head Start families are no more advantaged, and may be more disadvantaged, than nonenrolled families (GAO, 1994; Hofferth, 1994; Schnur, Brooks-Gunn & Shipman, 1992). However, given that Head Start serves only 40% of the eligible, poor children and their families, the tradeoff in electing to restrict the sample is that family characteristics that lead families to use Head Start may make them seriously non-representative of low-income families, as a group. Substantial caution will therefore be taken when making any broader claims regarding work, parenting, and the study's findings.

In sum, the research questions addressed in today's talk are as follows:

- First, what are patterns of work force participation and the quality of jobs held, among mothers with preschool-aged children enrolled in Head Start, and do these patterns of work force participation change with time?

- Second, does mothers' work involvement from Time 1 to Time 2 have a positive or negative effect on their depressive symptoms and on their use of emotionally negative parenting styles at Time 2? If effects of work on parenting and mental health are found, are these effects mediated by mothers' perceptions of financial strain? In other words, do women who work more, experience less financial strain, and in turn, manifest fewer depressive symptoms and less angry, coercive parenting styles, than do women who work less?

- Third, does the quality of employment, characterized by low occupational prestige and high stress have negative effects on mothers' depressive symptomatology and parenting styles?

- Fourth, is work participation and work quality, in turn, affected by mothers' psychological and parenting characteristics at Time 1? For example, is maternal depressive symptomatology at Time 1 predictive of how much women work, and of the types of jobs that women hold, between time periods?

Method

Sample-- At Time 1 (1996-1997), 146 Head Start-using families with low incomes (as defined by Head Start eligibility guidelines) and a target child, ages 3.8 - 4.6, were enrolled in a related study on parenting and children's social and emotional development. Families were recruited from both rural and urban settings in a single region of upstate NY. These settings included a) set of working-class and poor neighborhoods, primarily composed of African American families in a large, industrial Northeastern city (Rochester, NY) and b) a set of low- to middle-income, isolated farming communities, primarily composed of white families, in a sparsely populated, rural county (Tompkins County, NY) 100 miles south of the urban community described above. Two years later, 100 families were re-interviewed, and extensive questionnaire and observational data were collected. For each family visit, families were debriefed, thanked, and reimbursed $20. Complete, longitudinal data were available for 94 of these families, where the same female caregiver completed all assessments at both time points.

Between-site comparisons suggest that samples in rural versus urban sites where strongly racially segregated, with few African American families enrolled in the rural Head Start centers and few white families enrolled in the urban Head Start centers. Mothers were, on average, approximately 28-30 years of age, with no significant difference in age found between sites. A majority of mothers in both settings had completed high school, had worked during some portion of the two years prior to their participation in this study, and had incomes at or below $17,000 per year. At times 1 and 2, slightly over 1/3 of (38% and 34%) of mothers reported that their households had experienced some involvement with welfare recipiency (going "on" or "off of welfare") in the past year. Analyses of between-group differences on all exogenous and endogenous variables suggest that rural and urban mothers did not differ on most demographic characteristics, with the exception that rural mothers were significantly more likely to be married than urban mothers (Pearson Chi Square X^2=15.87, p< .001). Because few differences were found, based on mothers' residence, rural and urban subsamples were combined for all analyses.

Two years later (at Time 2), follow-up interviews were conducted with 100 of the 146 families that had been visited at Time 1. Analyses of participant attrition suggest that there were no significant differences between followed and non-followed families, on income, ethnic minority status, age, employment status at Time 1 or family size. We were unable to interview marginally more rural families than urban families, Chi Square = 3.14, p<.07. Review of contact records kept by research personnel suggests that this was largely due to rural families relocating out of the area.

Procedures-- Data for the analyses outlined below were collected during a 2-hour visit to families' homes. All data reported in this paper were collected during parent interviews conducted at Time 1 in the fall of the families' enrollment into Head Start (in 1996-1997) and again at Time 2(when most children were entering first grade) in 1998-1999. Interviews included a demographic questionnaire (assessing demographic characteristics, family income, and parents' history of employment over the past two years), parents' depressive symptoms (CES-D, Radloff, 1977), expressiveness of negative emotions such as anger and irritation (Halberstadt, 1995; Raver, in preparation) and parenting (Gerard, 1994). After the parental interview was completed, the parent was debriefed, thanked, and reimbursed $20 as a token the interviewer's appreciation.

Measures-- Following Garcia Coll et al. (1996) and others, all measures were screened for their appropriateness for use with both white and ethnic minority families. Most of

those listed below have a solid "track record" in their use with low-income communities, and were expected to be culturally sensitive and appropriate for use in this study.

Indices of mothers employment entry, exits, and length of participation were collected for mothers using employment history interviews, including start/end dates for each job, job title, description of each job, and number of hours worked per week for the last job held, for the two years prior to the family visit. Following Danziger, Corcoran, Danziger & Heflin (2000), *Mothers' work participation* was coded for the number of months worked within the twenty-four month interval between interviews, and as number of hours worked at the last job that the mother held. Mothers' most recent jobs were coded for *occupational prestige*, following the codebook used by the General Social Survey. Mothers also rated their most recent job in terms of *stressfulness* on a five-point scale, ranging from 0 ("not at all stressful") to "somewhat stressful" (2) to "too stressful" (4).

As part of a longer "Life Changes" questionnaire assessing stressful life events (MCCubbin & Patterson, 1981), mothers were asked to answer 4 items regarding *financial strain in the past year*, including whether they or anyone in their households had 1) "experience repossession of car:" or other items bought on "an installment plan, 2) strain on family money because of medical or dental expenses, 3) strain on family money because of an increase in food, clothing, utilities, or home care costs and 4) whether they or other members of their home had gone on welfare.

Mothers' *depressive symptoms* was assessed using the CES-D for depressive symptomatology (Radloff, 1977), = .85. *Parents' expressiveness of negative emotions such as anger and irritation* was assessed using two measures. The negative dominant subscale of the Self-Expressiveness in the Family Questionnaire (SEFQ, Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Parke & Fox, 1995) taps parents' proneness to expressions of anger and hostility and was used to assess the extent to which parents maintained an angry emotional climate in the home. The SEFQ is a parental report measure of the predominant style of emotional expressiveness used by the respondent in the context of everyday family events, correlates moderately with observed measures of parents expressed affect during laboratory tasks (Cassidy, et al., 1992; Halberstadt et al., 1995) and has been found to be reliable and valid with low-income samples (Garner, Jones & Miner, 1994; Greenberg et al., 1999). An additional 10-item questionnaire was added to assess parents' ability to maintain emotional equilibrium when faced with child rearing challenges, with items such as "Sometimes I blow up if my child nags at me while I'm trying to get dinner ready." High scores on the scale represent mothers' reports of high levels of anger and irritation during routine caregiving situations.

Parents' use of coercive versus firm limits was assessed using the 12-item limit-setting subscale of the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (Gerard, 1994). The subscale includes such items as "I have trouble disciplining my child" and "I often threaten to punish my child but never do." Previous research with this measure suggests that it is a valid index of parenting with high risk, ethnic minority populations, and correlates well with other measures of childrearing (McPhee et al., 1996). Alpha and test-retest reliabilities have been high with white and ethnic minority families (MacPhee et al., 1996), = .77.

The three measures of family emotional climate and disciplinary style (high expressiveness of anger and irritation, low ability to maintain emotional equilibrium during routine caregiving, and high use of coercive vs. firm limit-setting) were positively associated (see Appendix A), suggesting that they represent 3 important components of emotionally negative parenting style. The three measures were therefore standardized within Time 1 and Time 2 assessments, and were aggregated, so that the number of observed variables could be reduced for later analyses using structural

equation modeling (SEM) techniques, given the relatively small sample size (N<100)(Kline, 1998).

Results

Overview of planned analyses

First, descriptive statistics are provided on families' demographic characteristics and household composition in Table 1. Descriptive data from another recent set of analyses regarding work, mental health, and parenting among low income are included in Table 1 to aid the reader in interpreting these descriptive results. Then, details regarding the quality and types of the last job held by mothers in the two year time period between Time 1 and Time 2, are provided as are descriptive statistics regarding mothers' depressive symptoms and parenting style, at both time points. Then, simultaneous structural equation model-fitting (SEM) techniques are used to test a competing set of hypotheses regarding whether work has a positive or negative direct or indirect effect on parenting style, net of prior parenting and mental health, whether work and mental health may be bidirectionally linked, and whether work quality, as well as participation, may have a positive or negative effect on mental health and parenting at Time 2, net of parents' prior mental health and parenting histories.

Demographic characteristics and maternal employment between Time 1 and Time 2

First, what changes occurred in these low-income families' lives, over time? Of the women who were living alone in one-parent-households at Time 1 (45% of the total sample) the majority (75%) continued to live alone at Time 2, while the remaining formerly single mothers had since moved in with a partner or spouse. Similarly, 75% of the mothers who had been cohabiting with a partner at Time 1 were in a 2-parent household at Time 2. Shifts in household composition ld to slightly higher proportion of families in cohabiting households at Time 2 with almost twice as many shifting out of 1-parent households and into 2-parent households as the number becoming single. Family size remained stable, with families averaging between 2 and 3 children per household, (X=2.75, SD=1.26).

Mothers, on average, were significantly more likely to be working at Time 2 than Time1, X^2 (1,93)=8.47, p< .01, with ½ of women employed at the time of the initial interview, and 2/3rds of the mothers employed at Time 2. When asked if they had ever worked in the two years between assessments, 82 out of the 94 mothers had held at job for 5 hours a week or more, sometime in the past two years. Family income significantly increased, also, from Time 1 to Time 2 (F(1,93) = 24.36, p<.001), from an average reported value of $17,000 to $20,000 a year.

Analyses of mothers' employment histories yielded a complex portrait of the quantity and quality of work that low-income mothers engaged in, over the two years. Mothers worked, on average, 32 hours a week, a little less than 16 months out of the 24 months between visits, and were paid, on $7.72 an hour, on average. Regarding occupational prestige, the bulk of mothers held blue-collar service sector in service, manufacturing and clerical jobs. Typical employment held included jobs such as cashier, Certified Nurses Assistant, child care provider and assembler. On average, mothers rated their jobs relatively low on stressfulness (X = 1.44, SD = 1.35, range = 0 - 4). Mothers reported considerable instability or cycling in and out of unemployment, with

39% of mothers in the sample experiencing at least one episode where they had lost or left a job, while 44% had worked continuously and the remainder (17%) moving from unemployed to employed status.

Collection of follow-up data on 94 of the 146 families allowed a more complex approach to be taken regarding the impact of work on parenting. First, maternal employment could be conceptualized in more complex ways, examining work participation as a) labor force attachment operationalized in terms of the number of months worked in the two years between assessments, as well as b) number of hours worked and c) whether the mother was working at the time of the Time 2 assessment. In addition, key concerns regarding the type of work could be addressed, with quality of work operationalized as a) occupational prestige and b) the subjective rating of stressfulness of the last job held.

Mothers' mean levels of depressive symptoms, expressions of anger and frustration, and reported use of coercive versus firm limit-setting showed no significant differences from Time 1 to Time 2, as illustrated in Table 2.

Analyses of quantity of maternal employment, financial strain, mothers' depressive symptoms, and parenting style.

Structural equation models were run using Amos software(Arbuckle, 1999, version 4.01) to examine the goodness of fit for a model that included the 2 exogenous variables of mothers' negative parenting style and depressive symptomatology at Time 1 as predictors of the endogenous variables of negative parenting style and depressive symptomatology at Time 2. Hypothesized mediating endogenous variables of employment participation and financial hardship were also included, as were a set of five exogenous control variables of family income at Time 1, maternal age, ethnic minority status, level of educational attainment, and cohabitation with spouse/partner (at Time 2) with paths leading from all exogenous control variables to all endogenous variables (see Figure 1). The effects of the latent construct of work participation on mothers' depressive symptoms and parenting at Time 2 included direct as well as indirect paths, through mothers' report of financial hardship at Time 2. Work participation was included as an endogenous, rather than exogenous variable, thus providing a conservative estimate of impact of work and financial hardship on family functioning. The fit of this model was good, $X^2 = 4.33$, $p<.36$, $df = 4$, CFI = .998, and RMSEA = .030.

A second structural equation model was next built to test the hypothesis that the model of family functioning would fit equally well if mothers' work participation were not included, by setting all pathways from work to parenting and mental health at time 2 to 0. This second model did not fit the data substantially worse than did the first model, ($X2 = 23.75$, $p = .049$, $df = 14$, CFI = .933, RMSEA = .087). In the interests of parsimony, this model, with work participation's effects set to 0, can be considered the better-fitting of the two models.

One criticism of these models could be that they yield nonsignificant estimates of for the effect of work on parenting because the model is essentially too constrained, requiring substantial variability in parenting style from the first to the second assessment, in order for work to have any possible impact on these variables at time 2. Put simply, if parents do not experience substantial changes in the extent to which they are depressed or use angry, coercive parenting, then there will be a problem of range restriction in the residual scores of the outcome variables. Leaving aside questions of omitted variable bias, for a moment, parameter estimates of pathways from initial mental health and initial parenting were set to 0, and parameter estimates of pathways leading from work to parenting and mental health were freed, allows us to test the comparative fit of the model of the impact of work involvement on (unadjusted) parenting style and mental

health scores, at Time 2. This model offered a very poor fit, $X2 = 73.10$, $p = .000$, $df = 8$, CFI = .555, RMSEA = .296, and was therefore rejected.

Examination of those standardized coefficients of the best-fitting model suggests that were significant suggests that a) work participation had no discernable effect on parenting and mental health at Time 2, after including parenting and mental health assessments collected at Time 1. Interestingly, mothers' depressive symptoms were significantly (modestly) predicted by mothers' perception of material hardship, and depressive symptoms were significantly, modestly predictive of mothers' use of emotionally negative, coercive parenting style. Last, the model supports the hypothesis that often unmeasured maternal characteristics may affect both mothers' work and their later parenting and mental health. The strongest predictors of mothers' depressive symptoms and parenting style at Time 2 are their prior histories of mental health and parenting at Time 1. Significant pathways leading from mothers' depressive symptoms at Time 1 to their level of work participation suggests that maternal depressive symptoms do appear to pose a barrier to their level of work participation in the two years following, even after controlling for human and social capital characteristics such as educational attainment and presence of a partner or spouse in the home.

Analyses of quality of maternal employment on mothers' depressive symptoms and parenting style.

Next, a model was constructed to examine whether quality of the last job had a significant impact on maternal mental health and parenting at Time 2, testing the fit of a fixed effects model that included their initial psychological and parenting status at Time 1. This model was run for all mothers who had held at least one job in the past two years, N=82. This model fit well, $X2 = .46$, $p < .80$, $df=2$, CFI = .000, RMSEA = 1.0. Examination of the significant regression coefficients suggests that mothers' holding lower prestige jobs were at significantly, though only modestly increased risk of becoming more depressed from Time 1 to Time 2. Similarly, mothers in jobs with lower prestige were likely to become significantly more angry and coercive in their parenting style, over time. Similarly, mothers who reported working at more stressful jobs were significantly more likely to become more depressed, and more emotionally negative and coercive, in their parenting style, over time. (This last finding should be viewed with caution, given that stressfulness of job ratings were collected concurrently with assessments of mothers' depressive symptoms, at time 2, and may share substantial error variance).

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that most low-income mothers of Head Start enrolled children are working outside the home, in a range of service, clerical, manufacturing, and entry-level health care jobs. One half of the mothers in rural and urban sites were working when children were enrolled and 2/3rd were working 2 years later, with almost all mothers having held at least one job in the intervening two years. This suggests that early educational interventions would benefit from the knowledge that the mothers of the children in their classrooms are juggling the demands of both work and family. Head Start places strong programmatic emphasis on parent involvement as a key avenue of intervention with young children: Programs must recognize that parents face increasing demands of employment on their time, that parents are probably not available during many school day hours to participate in parent activities, and that parents may be less enthusiastic about such services as home visiting, given that many

women, are not home, themselves, much of the time. In short, findings of this study suggests that early educational interventions must find innovative ways to coordinate their efforts with local and regional policies aimed at strengthening families' economic self-sufficiency, rather than placing their goals for family participation at odds with mothers' employment goals.

Second, it is clear that this study failed to find a negative or a positive impact of maternal work involvement on mothers' depressive symptoms and on mothers' use of angry and coercive parenting style. These null findings are in keeping with other recent reports on the relatively weak impact of work and self-sufficiency activities on depressive symptoms and parenting in other, larger, randomized studies (Duncan &Chase-Lansdale, 2000). In short, this study may be yielding no significant effects of low-income mothers' work involvement on their mental health and parenting because working more months of a year, and more hours of the week doesn't harm these families.

It is important to note, however, that this study does not yield any evidence that work clearly helps them, either. For example, no evidence was found that mothers who work longer hours, more months of the year, report lower financial strain than for mothers who worked less. This is in keeping with others' suggestions that conditions of financial hardship are so substantial for poor families that mothers are not able to meet those needs even when working, given their wage rates (Danziger & Kalil, 2001; Jackson, et al, 2000). Alternately this study's measurement of financial hardship may not have adequately tapped families' material deprivation versus comfort—additional analyses are currently underway, using observers' ratings of the adequacy of families' housing, to determine whether work is associated with improvements in families' living conditions.

Third, this study found that lower-prestige, more stressful jobs have a significant, though modest negative impact on mothers' mental health and on their provision of optimal parenting, over time. This suggests that for (Head Start-using) low-income families with young children, the supposition that "any job is a good job," is open to question. Reviews of studies across a wide range of Welfare Reform demonstration programs are equivocal regarding whether a human capital investment approach, emphasizing mothers' further education and training, is better or worse than a "work first" approach, encouraging women to take the first job available. These findings suggest that there are potential negative ramifications of unstable, low-paying, and stressful jobs on family functioning (see Jackson et al, 2000 for similar cross-sectional findings; Greenberger, O'Neil & Nagel, 1994). Women who quickly "cycle" back out of work and onto public aid may be doing so because of the costs that low-wage, unstable, stressful work may have, for both mothers and their families, in psychosocial as well as economic terms. Questions of the value of human capital investments in mothers' education and training may become more salient in the next few years, given the prospect of higher rates of unemployment, more difficulty placing women in jobs, and slowing U.S. economic growth.

Fourth, it is of considerable concern that fully 1/3 of the mothers in this study reported clinical levels of depressive symptoms at the time of their child's enrollment into Head Start at Time 1. Mothers' depressive symptoms decreased over time, but 20% of mothers reported clinical levels of symptomatology at Time 2. These rates of depressive symptomatology are in keeping with the alarmingly high rates found other studies of low-income mothers (Danziger et al., 1999; Derr, Douglas & Pavetti, 2001; Lennon, et al, 2000). It is clear from this paper's longitudinal findings that mothers' depressive symptoms serve as a significant barrier to their work involvement, in support of results from a wide range of studies (Jackson, et al, 1999; Yoshikawa, 1999, Danziger et al,

2000). Importantly, while this growing body of research on the prevalence and consequences of maternal depression appears to be having an impact on policy debates in the area of welfare reform (Derr et al, 2001), maternal mental health is often left out of analyses of the effects of early educational intervention (for exceptions, see Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, & Fuligni, 1999; Burchinal, et al, 2001). Future research and educational policy would benefit from an analysis of the ways in which maternal depression may affect service take-up in early educational intervention in the same way that it appears to affect mothers' likelihood of working longer hours, for more months of the year, in this study (See Berlin, O'Neal, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998).

In summarizing the implications of this study's findings, a number of clear caveats are also in order. First, it is important to note that families in this study are not representative of TANF-receiving populations— that is, the mothers in this study were more highly educated, and somewhat better off, financially, when compared to families randomized into such programs as New Hope, JOBs, and New Chance demonstration programs. On the other hand, women in this study were managing work, family, and financial strain without the generous package of work supports that are available to the participants in many Welfare Reform demonstration programs. It is also important to note that this study examined the impact of maternal employment only on improvements and decrements in the family emotional climate, as well as the disciplinary style mothers reported using, over time. This paper did not examine parents' investment of time, money, and interest in enriching their children's home environments through cognitively stimulating materials and activities (Duncan, et al, 1994).

Lastly, small sample size precluded this study from a closer examination of the moderating influences of mothers' residence in 1- versus 2-parent households, ethnic minority membership, or residence in an urban versus rural setting. For example, given that African American and white families reside in spatially segregated neighborhoods with widely differing rates of joblessness (Duncan & Aber, 1997), and that African American women face significantly greater barriers to higher-paying employment, and have a much longer history of greater labor force participation than do white women (Dill, 1987), models would be expected to fit differently for these two groups. Multiple group path analyses with a much larger sample would yield clearer answer to these questions and would provide the opportunity to examine ways that the quality of women's jobs may moderate the influence of work participation on family functioning.

Thus, findings of this study raise a set of additional questions that can be best pursued in additional research with larger, more nationally representative data sets. These findings highlight important questions regarding the quality as well as quantity of work that low-income mothers of young children are engaged in, and the importance of considering families' emotional climates and mothers' mental health when assessing the impact of work on parenting. Answers to these questions will provide a more complete empirical portrait of mothers' struggles and successes in balancing the complex demands of work and family, while also under the pressure of economic disadvantage.

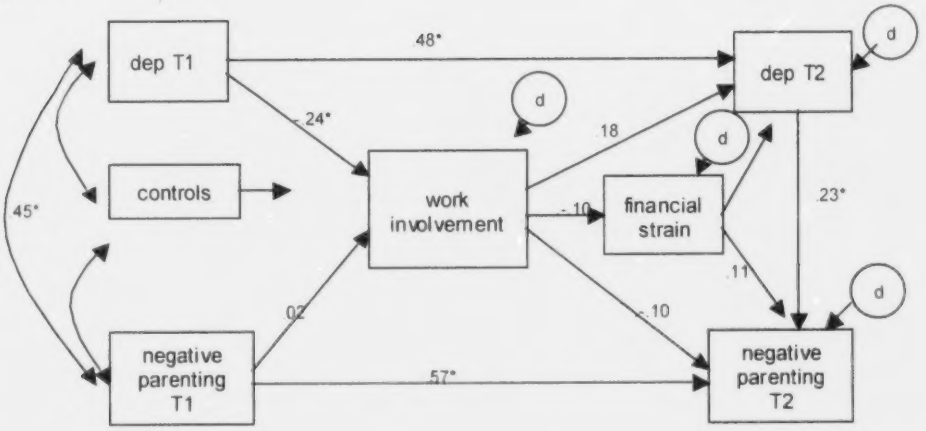
Table 1 Descriptive characteristics at Time 2 for families enrolled in this study as well as demographic characteristics of a second "naturalistic" study of individual differences in low-income women's work, service use, mental health, and parenting, among women enrolled in New Hope (Gibson, 2000).

			Gibson, 2000 full sample	
Parents' average age	29.93 (7.90)		31.8	
% of parents with >= GED, HS dip	81		57.3	
% parents married	33		21.8	
% parents cohabiting with a partner	29			
% Black	53		51.4	
% with welfare involvement/past year	34		62.9	
% reporting public aid involvement since target child's birth	70			
% Three or more children in family	51		31.5	

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of mothers' employment, income, mental health, and parenting at Time 1 and Time 2.

Variable	Time 1 X	SD	Time 2 X	SD
%working at time of interview	52%		64%	
Months worked			15.97	9.18
Hours worked/week			32.12	16.39
Pay per hour			$ 7.72	$4.64
CESD	11.65	7.69	12.07	9.35
Limit-setting subscale (PCRI)	49.89	9.18	50.35	8.05
Expressiveness of anger (ND subscale of FESQ)	3.82	1.06	3.90	1.23
Express frustration, anger during caregiving tasks	40.84	5.72	41.38	6.09

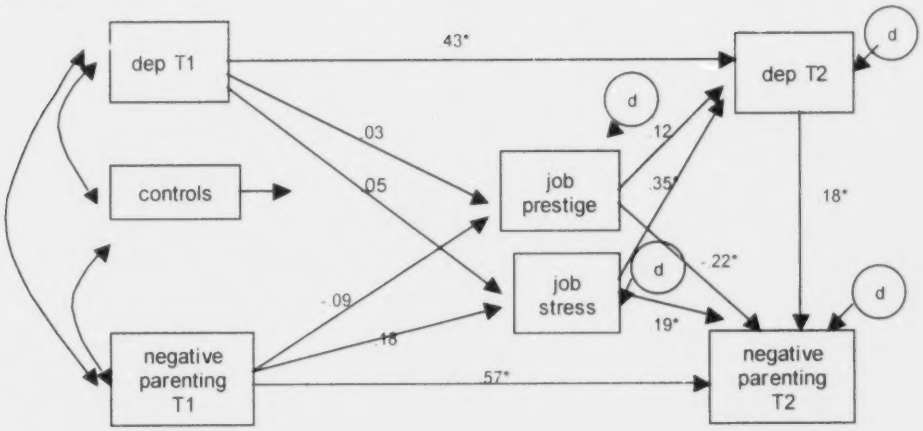
Figure 1.



Model fit indices: Chi Square = 4.32, df = 4, p = .36, CFI = .998, RMSEA = .030.

Note: control variables include income at time 1, maternal age, mother's education, mother's ethnic minority status, and whether mother lives with a partner or spouse. Paths from all control variables to all endogenous variables are included in the model, but are left off of the figure for the sake of visual clarity.

Figure 2.


dep T1
43*
dep T2
d
d
.12
.03
.05
job prestige
.35*
18*
controls
d
- 22*
job stress
d
- 09
.18
19*
negative parenting T1
.57*
negative parenting T2

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